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Commission on the Status of Women
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Agenda item 3 (a) (i)
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: priority theme: challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

High-level round table on challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Chairs' summary

1. On 10 March 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level round table on challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. The high-level round table focused on the sharing of national experiences, lessons learned and good practices. A discussion guide provided the framework for the interactive dialogue.

2. The high-level round table was organized in two parallel sessions in order to allow for interaction among the large number of participants. The Chair of the Commission, Libran Cabactulan, and the Vice-Chair of the Commission, Carlos García González, presided over the sessions. The meeting opened with the screening of a short video on challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. In total, 46 government representatives made statements, as did a representative of the European Union. The following invited representatives of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations took part in the interactive dialogue: Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Lakshmi Puri; Chair of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, Frances Raday; Special

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Adviser to the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning, Amina Mohammed; and Gita Senof Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era.

3. Speakers reaffirmed the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. While considerable progress had been made towards achieving the Goals, overall progress on gender equality and women's rights remained uneven. The eradication of extreme poverty and hunger under Goal 1 was one area where challenges persisted and targets had not been met. Participants reported some success through various poverty-reduction strategies undertaken at the national level. Serious gender gaps existed, however, resulting in the increased feminization of poverty. There was agreement that poverty eradication was at the heart of achieving the Millennium Development Goals and any new development agenda for the post-2015 era, and that unless the gender dimensions of Goal 1 were addressed progress in meeting the Goal would stall.

4. Participants mentioned that significant progress had been made on girls' primary education, and the Millennium Development Goals were credited with ensuring that the issue received global attention. Participants referred to good practices in national education policies focused on girls' education, such as training for girls in both urban and rural areas, free education and school books, among others. While gender parity in primary education had been achieved, however, regional and socioeconomic disparities were discernable and progress on girls' secondary and tertiary education was still lagging. Furthermore, participants noted that even though enrolment rates had increased significantly, the quality of education remained an issue in terms of curricula and learning, as well as safety and security, including the inadequacy of facilities for girls. Participants expressed concern that the lack of progress on secondary and tertiary education and the quality of education at all levels posed a significant risk to the next generation of girls and young women.

5. Progress in meeting the health-related targets had been mixed. With regard to Goal 4, on reducing child mortality, and Goal 5, on improving maternal health, participants highlighted some good practices in health-care service provision, such as training of midwives, free medical examinations and other services, immunization programmes and implementation at the community level. Despite some successful programmes, many participants said that Goal 6, on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, had not been met. It was suggested that progress on meeting health targets had been slow because the issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights had not been explicitly or adequately addressed in the Millennium Development Goals. That issue must be taken into account in setting targets if development goals were to be achieved.

6. Progress for women and girls in achieving the Millennium Development Goals had often been achieved through the prioritization of universally accessible public services, social protection and quality infrastructure. That included quality education, in particular at the secondary level, care services, multisectoral services to respond to violence against women and girls, and health services that address women's and girls' right to health, including sexual and reproductive health, at all stages of life. Some participants pointed to the need to focus on local service delivery for women and girls. Social protection had played an important role in implementing the Goals for women and girls, in particular in the areas of poverty

and hunger, employment and child health. Several participants highlighted the contribution of policies in support of mothers with low incomes, single-parent households and older women, as well as maternity entitlements and pensions. Ensuring access to quality infrastructure for water and sanitation, for example, was identified as particularly important for women's and girls' health, dignity and safety. Other policies to implement the Goals for women and girls had prioritized infrastructure development in areas of energy, electricity and transport services.

7. Several participants mentioned that the promotion of decent work for women was fundamental for creating a just society. In that regard, numerous efforts at the national level to increase women's participation in the labour market were noted, such as anti-discrimination measures in the workplace, laws against sexual harassment and the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and actions, including the provision of child care, flexible working arrangements, such as compressed work schedules, to enable both women and men to combine work with family responsibilities. Despite those efforts, however, most participants noted that gender equality in the labour market remained a major challenge and that significant gaps in the employment rates of women and men persisted. Women were overrepresented in informal employment and were paid less for work of equal value. Significant efforts would be needed to achieve gender equality in that area and to empower women.

8. Participants noted another significant barrier to women's participation in the labour market on an equal basis with men: their lack of assets, including land, other property and financial assets. That was seen as a key gap in the Millennium Development Goals and one that needed to be recognized. Several speakers highlighted the need to include women's ownership and control over land and other assets, including financial assets, in the post-2015 agenda. Some pointed out that women's access to financial assets should not be limited to microfinance.

9. Participants reported that progress had been made in women's representation in parliaments and within political parties as a result of temporary special measures adopted in some countries. Quotas and other affirmative action measures had proved to be important and effective vehicles for increasing women's political participation. Nonetheless, globally, women continued to be underrepresented in decision-making processes, including in parliaments, public administration, the judiciary and the private sector. A critical requirement for achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls was their participation at all levels of decision-making, in both public and private institutions. Women's effective participation in all decision-making forums would enable them to influence public policies and spending priorities so as to make progress towards adequately addressing women's needs and priorities, including the provision of quality services, access to justice, the protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the gender-responsive management of resources.

10. It was recognized that, overall, efforts made to achieve Goal 8, on global partnerships, had been inadequate, as had contributions in terms of official development assistance, especially with respect to gender equality. The need for greater development cooperation, capacity-building, sharing of good practices, and increased transfer of technology was expressed, as well as the need for an increase in resources across sectors to invest in accountability mechanisms and gender-responsive planning and budgeting and to scale up and replicate good

practices. Calls were made for improved South-South and North-South cooperation and engagement in meaningful global partnerships.

11. Participants drew attention to the failure of the Millennium Development Goals to address violence against women and girls. They recognized the devastating consequences of such violence for individuals, families and societies, and the fact that it took a variety of forms, including trafficking, psychological abuse, harmful traditional practices and harassment, and was perpetrated at home, at work, in schools and in other contexts. Although legal and policy reforms had been made to address violence against women, effective implementation and enforcement remained a challenge, especially at the local and community levels. Participants agreed that violence against women and girls was a universal problem and that, as the "missing" Millennium Development Goal, its inclusion in any forthcoming development framework was crucial.

12. According to participants, the Millennium Development Goals had insufficiently addressed the disproportionate impact of climate change, natural and other disasters, economic and political crises, and conflict on women and girls. Such crises and disasters impeded progress in meeting targets for development. Participants emphasized the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding processes to achieving and sustaining peace. Participants called for economic and climate justice targets to be considered in the post-2015 development agenda and, in particular, for gender-responsive targets to be mainstreamed across the three dimensions (social, economic and environmental) of the sustainable development goals in the post-2015 development agenda.

13. Several participants identified the disproportionate share of unpaid care work done by women and girls as an obstacle to achieving gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals, as it held them back from enjoying rights in several areas, including employment, education, health and political participation. At the same time, the lack of progress in achieving the Goals, for example in the area of water and sanitation, often intensified women's unpaid work burden, as it was mainly women who were responsible for water collection. Participants emphasized the need to recognize unpaid care work as a social responsibility to be shared by all. Policies aiming to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work included childcare services, social services and initiatives reconciling work and family life. Unpaid care work was highlighted as a priority for the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals.

14. It was noted that Millennium Development Goal targets based on global and national averages had masked the unevenness of achievements across the population and the position of disadvantage occupied by marginalized groups of women and girls who experience multiple forms of inequalities. Inequalities based on income, geographical location, age, disability and other context-specific characteristics intersected with gender and impeded the achievement of the Goals for marginalized groups of women and girls. A concerted effort was needed to address those multiple inequalities, ensure the achievement of the Goals for the most marginalized groups and lay the ground for the post-2015 development agenda.

15. Institutional arrangements such as national development plans and poverty reduction strategies were critical for the effective implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen institutional capacity through increased funding for gender equality, the

provision of training on gender analysis and gender-responsive budgeting, and the promotion of such analysis and budgeting in all line ministries.

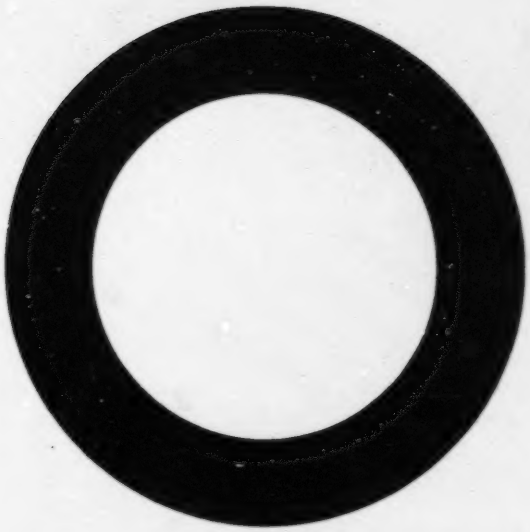
16. Questions of monitoring, evaluation, data availability and accountability also received considerable attention. Several participants noted that the dearth of gender statistics had made it difficult to monitor progress on the Millennium Development Goals from a gender perspective. Among the key reasons identified was the weak capacity at the national level to produce gender statistics, which was linked to underinvestment in that area. Participants noted that accountability, governance and adequate monitoring would be key for the success of the post-2015 framework. Although there had been progress in terms of the availability of gender statistics since the Goals had been developed, countries still did not have adequate baseline data on several dimensions of gender equality and women's rights. Much work needed to be done to make sure that the data revolution would address gender statistics adequately. Participants highlighted the need for improved data collection efforts, in particular with respect to violence against women and time use.

17. Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights for achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls beyond their target date, drawing attention to civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. For example, the pervasiveness of violence against women constituted a grave violation of human rights and was a drag on sustainable development. Unequal inheritance rights are a violation of human rights and prevent women and girls from equally benefiting from sustainable development. Women's lack of voice in decision-making at all levels is a violation of human rights and impedes achievement of the Goals. Some participants articulated the links between the implementation of the Goals for women and girls and existing international commitments to promote gender equality and women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Looking forward, many participants stressed the importance of anchoring the post-2015 development agenda and the future sustainable development goals in international human rights obligations.

18. Participants also stressed the importance of a coherent legal and policy framework in guaranteeing women's human rights, promoting gender equality and achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. A strong legal framework, inclusive of the constitution and grounded in human rights principles, was essential to ensuring that gains made in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment would withstand political or regime changes. Political will and commitments from governments were needed to ensure that the legal and policy framework would be gender responsive and effectively implemented and enforced.

19. Building on the lessons of the Millennium Development Goals, there was widespread support for a stand-alone goal on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment and the comprehensive integration of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue to be addressed in the future sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda. Several participants highlighted that such a goal should address those high-priority issues that would transform structural gender inequalities, including: violence against women and girls; child, early and forced marriage; sexual and reproductive health and rights; women's access to and control over assets and productive resources; girls' and women's right to a quality education

at all levels; women's access to decent work and the elimination of the gender wage gap; women's universal access to social protection and services; women's disproportionate share of unpaid care work; and women's leadership and partnership at all levels. Several participants highlighted that gender equality remained a universal challenge: no country had achieved it. The future framework should therefore apply to all people, in all countries.



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Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Moderator's summary

1. On 12 March 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive panel on the priority theme: "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls". The panel was moderated by the Vice-Chair of the Commission, Neli Shiolashvili. The panellists were: the Vice-Minister of the Secretariat of Women Policies of the Presidency of Brazil, Lourdes Bandeira; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Urmas Paet; a professor based at the Asian Centre of the University of the Philippines, Carolyn Sobritchea; the Head of Policy and Advocacy at the Agency for Cooperation and Research and Development, Salina Sanou; and the Deputy Director of the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Maarit Kohonen Sheriff.

Women's participation in political processes

2. Linking with the Commission's panel on the priority theme, with an emphasis on progress and gaps in the implementation of, and lessons learned from, the Millennium Development Goals, this panel focused on the participation of women and girls and strengthening accountability in the implementation of the Goals. The discussion emphasized that having a voice and participating in the political processes and decisions that determine their lives was a fundamental dimension of women's and girls' human rights and was critical for achieving all development

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goals. Attention was paid to the fact that the Millennium Development Goals monitored women's participation through one indicator on women's participation in national parliaments and, despite some gains for women over the past two decades in this particular dimension, women still represented only one in five parliamentarians.

3. Participants pointed out that supporting women's and girls' participation in decision-making at all levels, from the global to the local level, could influence public policies and spending patterns so as to ensure the adequate provision of services, guarantee women's physical integrity and reproductive rights and improve their access to education and health care and decent work. Speakers mentioned that amplifying women's voices and participation in household decision-making was also critically important and could have a direct impact on the well-being of women and girls and their families. Participants reiterated that achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls would also require investing in gender-responsive accountability mechanisms to enable them to hold duty bearers to account.

4. The discussion highlighted effective strategies for enabling women's participation in monitoring and implementing the Millennium Development Goals; steps taken by Member States to ensure the participation of women's groups, in particular grass-roots organizations, in defining the new agenda; and lessons learned in making accountability central to development.

Challenges of the existing Millennium Development Goals framework for women and girls

5. The Millennium Development Goals project had produced mixed results for women and girls. Participants agreed that a dedicated goal on gender equality had been important for focusing attention on continued discrimination, but the narrowly defined targets and indicators had undermined a more holistic understanding of how gender inequality and sexism manifested themselves and were perpetuated in societies. Even in areas where progress was being reported, such as in eliminating extreme poverty and access to safe water, women and girls had not necessarily been at the forefront of that progress owing to the limited measures taken to address the root causes of gender inequality.

6. Moreover, the conceptualization of the Millennium Development Goals did not address crucial issues related to the structural constraints to gender equality. The constraints include: the disproportionate share of unpaid care work carried out by women and girls; women's lack of access to assets and productive resources; women's low participation in decision-making at all levels; insufficient attention to sexual and reproductive health and rights; violence against women and girls; unequal power relations between women and men; and discriminatory social norms, stereotypes and practices that continue to hold women and girls back. Participants stressed that qualitative change was not only about addressing the rights of women and girls; it was also about socialization and the role of men and boys and their active consciousness, awareness and involvement in addressing gender inequality.

7. Many participants highlighted efforts at the national level to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including efforts to accelerate the achievement of the Goals, in particular Goal 3, and more specifically, the mainstreaming of gender concerns across other Goals. These efforts included the provision of dedicated

financing for gender-related initiatives; the appointment of dedicated focal points within government administrative systems and departments; capacity-building for public officials, in particular the police and the judiciary, through gender-sensitive training; the implementation of quotas for women's political participation; and ensuring the collection of gender-disaggregated data in order to be able to measure and target women's participation at all levels. Country initiatives that focused on addressing violence against women emerged as a common theme, although the exclusion of the issue from the Millennium Development Goals was noted by many of the participants.

8. A number of participants drew attention to the existing global and national challenges to addressing gender equality and gender mainstreaming, among them the lack of political participation by women and the lack of participation by women at all other levels of decision-making, including within civil society organizations. Regarding the 30 per cent target for women's political participation, participants noted that only 30 countries had reached the target and 23 of those countries had reached the target as a result of quotas. Strategies for encouraging women to participate at all levels of government — national, provincial and local — were called for, as well as for ensuring that the roles and responsibilities between all levels of government were well defined to ensure accountability for action on gender mainstreaming.

9. Other impediments to achieving gender equality and women's rights included the impact of conflict in many parts of the world; the continued marginalization of groups of women, including but not limited to rural women; the prevailing social norms of unequal power relations between men and women, which perpetuated and enforced gender stereotypes that prevented women from participating in the formal economy, owning property or being able to inherit; and the lack of mechanisms at the national level for holding States accountable for their actions with regard to women and girls. Some participants raised the issue of the need to engage more systematically with professional women so that they can represent women more strategically and also work to encourage the participation of women in all sectors and to make better use of public-private partnerships.

Lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals and looking forward to the post-2015 development agenda

10. Many lessons have emerged from the Millennium Development Goals process, both in the development of the Goals and in their implementation, particularly in relation to the lack of participation by women and women's groups in setting the agenda and the lack of transparency of the process. Some participants suggested that little attention had been given to local contexts in which the Goals would have to be achieved. Participants also highlighted the lack of alignment between human rights standards and the Goals and the lack of adequate targets and indicators for ensuring and measuring real and sustainable progress.

11. Much of the discussion focused on issues for consideration in relation to the post-2015 development agenda, in particular the importance of effective accountability mechanisms, especially at the national level, to ensure the achievement of the future development goals. Many speakers stressed the need to ensure that women's voices would be heard in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda, as well as of ensuring women's ongoing participation in

monitoring its implementation through civil society and grass-roots organizations. Some also discussed the role of international development cooperation in the accountability processes established for the post-2015 development agenda.

12. In regard to the processes tasked with elaborating the post-2015 development agenda, many participants acknowledged the participatory nature of the consultations to date but were also concerned about the possible risk of the discussions moving back into a high-level political sphere. Therefore, many participants stressed the need for civil society and women's organizations to consult with each other and to work together on the development of common priorities so as to ensure their ongoing participation in, and influence on, the relevant consultative mechanisms established to elaborate the future sustainable development agenda.

13. Participants shared proposals on the themes to be included in the next development framework. Using an overall human rights framework and in support of a stand-alone goal on gender equality and the mainstreaming of gender equality into all indicators, those included: comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services; zero tolerance for violence against women and girls; access to justice; addressing the situation of women in conflict situations; the allocation of resources; and transparency and accountability.